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ABSTRACT

The current status of state policy on minimum competency testing in Wisconsin, and the political process that produced that policy, are explored in this report. The document presents the preliminary findings of research conducted for a doctoral dissertation. The research methodology, mentioned only briefly, involved participant observation, in-depth interviews with educators, state administrators, and legislators, as well as documentary research. The study examined the policy-making process by analyzing each of four components of the legislative work flow (articulation, aggregation, allocation, and oversight) in terms of three research paradigms (institutional, process, and behavioral). The bulk of the report consists of an analysis of the issues involved in formulating legislation governing the use of minimum competency testing. The interests of the public, legislators, educators, special interest groups, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and the governor's office in different aspects of the policy are described, and the impact of those interests at different stages in the political history of the legislation up to the present is detailed. (PGD)

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THE POLITICS OF COMPETENCY TESTING POLICY FORMATION IN WISCONSIN

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Introduction and Methodology

This paper examines and describes the current status of minimum competency testing (MCT) policy in Wisconsin and the political process which produced that policy. The paper reports preliminary findings of doctoral dissertation research conducted by the author at the University of Wisconsin, Department of Educational Administration. This case study utilized participant observation, depth interviews and documentary research to describe and analyze the process of policy development. Table 1 indicates the number of persons interviewed and identifies the respondents by their affiliation.

The decision making process and influences on that process form the basis of the study's theoretical framework. Analysis includes the three research paradigms--institutional, process, and behavioral (Wahlke 1975, Mitchell 1981). These are framed by four components of the legislative workflow: articulation, aggregation, allocation, and oversight (Almond and Powell 1966, Mitchell 1981). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of the study in which the three research paradigms are integrated with the legislative work-flow. Each research perspective has been utilized to investigate each work-flow stage in a manner suggested by Mitchell (1981). Mitchell (1981) suggested a need for research which explores the integration of each research paradigm and the legislative work-flow.

Table 1

Interviews Conducted
September Through March 1981

Affiliation	Number *
Legislators	12
Legislative staff	4
Governor's staff	2
Department of Public Instruction Personnel	4
Interest Group Representatives	9

* Several additional interviews are either scheduled or anticipated with legislators, legislative staff, and interest group representatives. While counted only once, several persons have been interviewed two or more times.

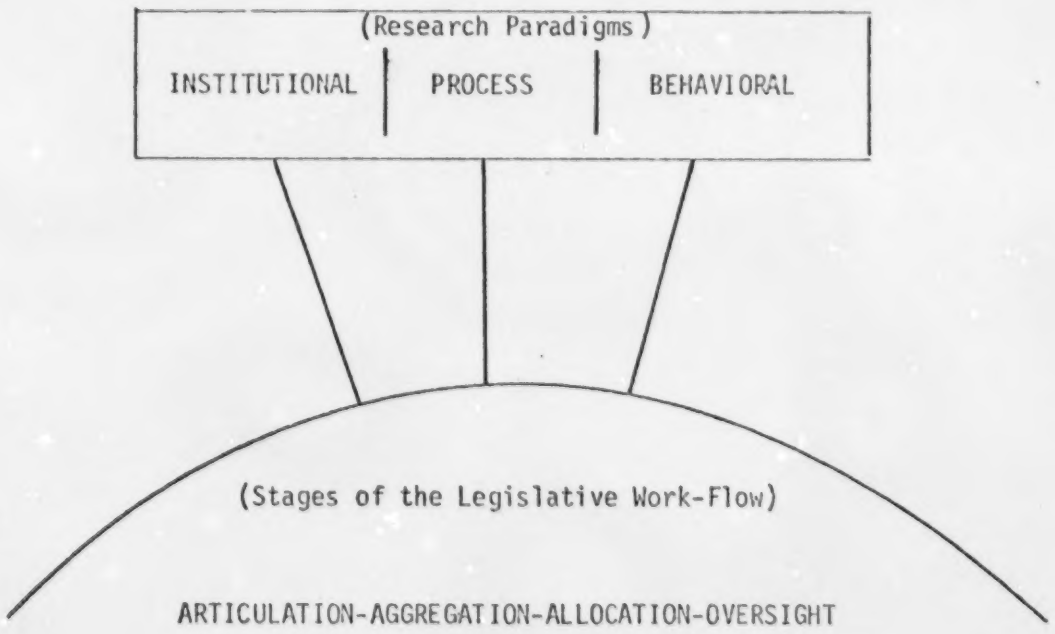

Figure 1--Graphic representation of Mitchell's research model.

Issues and MCT Legislation

Many issues were subsumed within the more general question of competency testing. Some of the subissues were complex, and had obscure educational consequences. Other issues were more of a straightforward political nature. The subissues fragmented traditional legislative coalitions and the educational establishment. The following list of issues had different degrees of importance in the MCT policy debate, but all were considered:

Teacher evaluation: The use of the results of competency testing in a way which affects a teacher's employment or job classification as opposed to promotion of dialogue.

Student remediation: Remedial education or special help for students who fail competency tests.

Parent notification: Reporting of competency test results to parents.

Public notice of results by districts: Required public reporting (such as publishing in a newspaper) of district test score averages.

State mandated district involvement: A State law which requires local districts to test students for competency in some manner.

Passing standards set by local districts or the DPI: Who or what agency should decide on acceptable minimum levels of achievement?

Testing grade levels: At what grade levels should competency testing take place?

Graduation requirement: How should students who do not pass a high school competency test be treated? For example, should they be denied a high school diploma or otherwise identified.

Cost to the school district: Any costs which the district might incur as a result of a state competency testing law.

Cost to the state: Any costs incurred by the State of Wisconsin as a result of a competency testing law.

Political issues affected by the different pedagogical and operational arrangements included the question of local control versus a perceived extension of state involvement in education; the comparison of district test scores versus potential personal and financial results of those comparisons; spread of accountability demands to other aspects of education; competition with existing educational evaluation enterprizes; and personal conflict, prestige and ambitions.

The issues which generated the most debate were teacher evaluation, state mandate of district involvement, and the graduation requirement. The teacher evaluation issue has been discussed previously. Because it was a necessary item for the WEA, the Assembly vote on an amendment prohibiting use of test scores for teacher discipline or discharge became a WEA "roll call vote" and a life or death situation for the bill.

The various opponents of the bill saw the opportunity to defeat the bill at that juncture and argued extensively against the provision.

The issues split traditional alliances and coalitions. State mandated testing was opposed by a coalition made up of conservatives who traditionally oppose increased state educational activity under the rubric of "local control" and a liberal contingent who were concerned about a state controlled curriculum among other aspects of the bill. Other conservatives supported the bill because of the fiscal and educational benefits of accountability. The debate over a state mandated program was heated. Specific aspects of the program such as options for local districts regarding grade levels tested and tests administered muddied the waters.

The use of tests for screening the receipt of graduation certificates triggered a negative reaction from liberal legislators. Suggested compromises included the use of certificates of attendance for those who failed their last minimum competency test and adoption of the "Racine system" of signifying successful MCT passage on the diploma. Conservative legislators generally wanted the tests required for graduation.

It was generally agreed by all concerned that any extra cost to school districts as a result of a state mandated program should be paid by the state.

Legislators reported that some aspects of the competency testing legislation appealed to them while other provisions did not. Some legislators for instance found the back-to-the-basics idea and tougher standards appealing, yet balked at what appeared to be an extension of state involvement in local districts. Other legislators liked the idea of public accountability but opposed the bill because of the potential penalties for individual students who do not pass the tests. The result of these internal value conflicts was confusion, uncertainty, a desire to postpone decision, and in some cases an unwillingness to support a proposal about which they were unsure. Interest groups opposed to MCT skillfully used conflicting values, and the complexity of testing itself to increase confusion in attempts to delay and stop the bill.

The issue of racial or ethnic bias has not been a major issue in Wisconsin. The Assembly Education Committee amended AB205 to include the phrase: "To the extent possible, the tests and test items shall be free of bias." Even though test bias has not been a major issue, the few minority members of the Wisconsin legislature have consistently opposed the bill on more general grounds. The Wisconsin minority community seems split on the issue with one faction echoing columnist William Raspberry's assertion that testing, standards, and remediation will be good for minority youth and another faction cynical

about how the tests will be used by an educational establishment in which they have little confidence.

Recent Testing Developments in Wisconsin

Attempts to legislate educational accountability in Wisconsin began when former Governor Patrick J. Lucey recommended the establishment of state policy for educational assessment in the early and middle 1970's. Since the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction had not assessed student achievement, the primary source of data regarding student achievement at that time came from University sources. In a 1976 speech to Milwaukee Public School Administrators, Lucey indicated that Wisconsin was not alone in the decline of student achievement but cited a 60 percent failure rate on a test of English usage by prospective journalism majors at the University of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, 1977).

Lucey inserted a provision requiring assessment of educational performance in Wisconsin schools into the 1971 Executive Budget. The first student achievement report of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and its "Wisconsin Pupil Assessment Program" was made in 1977. The assessment tested a sample of Wisconsin's public school students in three grades. Not satisfied with this approach, Lucey's 1977 executive budget contained a proposal to expand testing to all Wisconsin students in three different grades. The proposal was deleted from the budget bill by the Joint Finance Committee on a vote of 14-0.

With Lucey's departure from the Governor's office, statewide assessment became a politically dormant issue but a number of forces were active under the surface. The University continued to lament the difficulty students were having with basic skills. Noting that approximately 40 percent of the students at UC-Berkeley were enrolled in remedial courses, the Final Report of the U.W. Task Force on Basic Skills estimated that at least 25 percent of Wisconsin's entering freshmen were "without the basic skills competencies needed for success in traditional entry-level courses" (Final Report, U.W. Task Force, 1979, p. 10). The University of Wisconsin System has been engaged in a Basic Skills Improvement Program since 1977 and the 1981-82 biennial budget for that program is $859,000 for salaries. University reports through out this period continued to express concern about basic skill achievement and stressed the need for cooperative efforts by all levels of education in basic skills education.

A key supporter of competency testing since the Lucey period has been the Wisconsin Educational Association (WEA). The WEA represents approximately 80 percent of Wisconsin elementary and secondary teachers and has been described as the most influential interest group in Wisconsin politics (Lehne 1981, p. 79). In 1977 the WEA actually had a draft competency testing bill and since that time the WEA actively studied the issues of basic education and teacher competence in Wisconsin. As a result of their studies the leadership of the WEA became

more convinced that competency testing was a means of initiating desired change. Despite a change in presidents, the WEA continued their behind the scenes support of competency testing and were strong supporters when the bills were first introduced in 1981. WEA support of minimum competency testing is unique since it is the only state education association in the nation to do so.

Nationally, between 1974 and 1981 the percentage of persons giving public schools an "A rating" on Gallup polls declined from 18 to 9 percent and the percentage rating public schools a "B" declined from 30 to 27 percent (Kappan 1981). In Wisconsin the publication of University reports, WEA studies, and nationally distributed articles which condemned achievement levels may have had an effect on public opinion. Public perception appears not to rely solely on the media, however, as is illustrated by a Wisconsin study which found senior citizens concerned because of personal experiences (Burroughs 1982) (Kliminski, McCarthy and Scott 1982).

The legislators who were later to introduce competency testing legislation were oblivious to neither underlying public opinion nor the sentiment of the WEA. Senator Paul Offner, the author of Senate Bill 139, while still an assemblyman, and as early as 1975, spoke of declining educational attainment to such audiences as The Wisconsin Association of School Boards. It was Offner's legislative staff which first

studied the issue, developed a position paper, and began tentative efforts at issue articulation with the various education interest groups. Senator Offner and his staff were joined by the Assembly majority leader, Representative Tom Loftus, who authored an identical companion Assembly Bill (AB205) and contributed both his own and staff attention to the articulation and aggregation process. Senator Offner and Representative Loftus have co-authored numerous bills and established a joint legislative agenda.

For the Department of Public Instruction, the issue of educational accountability in Wisconsin remained essentially dormant until the campaign for Wisconsin State Superintendent in 1981. Wisconsin has no State Board of Education but elects a State Superintendent every four years. The 1981 State Superintendent's race saw the incumbent Barbara Thompson and a former State Representative and school administrator Herbert Grover emerge from a five-person primary to oppose each other in the April 6, 1981, election.

According to a Grover campaign worker, minimum competency testing was one of about five issues which the Grover campaign staff identified early on as campaign issues. Grover supported a statewide competency testing program and said he liked many of the elements of a proposal which was soon to be introduced in the Wisconsin Legislature. He

campaigned vigorously and competency testing legislation became a major component of his platform. Grover took that platform across the state in a barnstorming fashion to both assembled audiences and newspaper editors. Incumbent Superintendent Thompson, a strong advocate of "local control," consistently opposed state competency testing because of "the politically motivated purposes inherent in the proposals" (Youth Policy and Law Newsletter, Vol. 5, No. 1). A person close to the Thompson campaign related that Thompson was put in the position of defending Wisconsin education because the random sampled Wisconsin Assessment Program statistics showed no significant decline in student achievement. A spokesman for Thompson told the Associated Press that the Department was concerned that the "financial aid formula might be adjusted to penalize districts whose students show below average achievement" (AP, Arthur L. SRB, 2-4-81).

Articulation of the competency testing issues took place at several levels throughout the last half of 1980 and through 1981. The amorphous public conviction that something was wrong with "basics education" was transformed into a conviction that minimum competency testing was a way to address the problem. As a result of the campaign for state superintendent, the editorial response from the majority of the State's newspapers, and the activities of the Senator and Representative authors of soon-to-be introduced competency

testing legislation, the public came to identify minimum competency testing with school improvement.

The authors of the impending legislation and their staff persons met informally with the various educational interest groups and representatives of the Department of Public Instruction on several occasions in an attempt to explain the intention of the bill and to ask for input from the various professional interests. Even though all were not happy with the resulting bill, representatives of the major educational interest groups are unanimous in their feeling that sufficient effort was made by the authors and legislative staff to distill input of fact and opinion.

Legislative articulation of the bill occurred to some extent during the campaign for state superintendent and in the days following. The debate between candidates and within the press helped define the issue but did not refine the components of competency testing to the point of complete articulation. Questions remained regarding how real the problems of education were and there was a great deal of ambiguity about specific aspects of competency testing programs. Because of Thompson's defensive position during the campaign and because of a genuine fissure within the educational community on the subject, a clear definition of the problem and agreement on the quality of education in Wisconsin were not immediate products of the debate. What did become clear to most legislators, and more so as time went on, was that the

public was overwhelmingly in favor of minimum competency testing. Both identification of specific interests affected by the issue and a definition of the issue remained unaccomplished due to the many subissues involved in the legislation. It took time for legislators to sort out answers to the questions posed by specific aspects of MCT and even longer to sort through various codified alternatives and to find the positions of the various educational interest groups.

Minimum Competency Testing in the Legislature

Competency testing legislation was introduced in both houses of the Wisconsin Legislature in February, 1981. Senator Offner, the author of the Senate bill (SB139), was a three-term Senator and member of the Joint Finance Committee. Representative Loftus, the author of the Assembly bill (AB205), was a three-term assemblyman and is the current majority leader. Sponsorship was the same for both bills with the Representatives co-sponsoring SB139 and the Senators co-sponsoring AB205. Both authors were Democrats and both houses were Democratically controlled. The bills received bipartisan support in sponsorship (20 Democrats and 10 Republicans) and the sponsors evenly represented urban and rural districts.

SB139 and AB204 were introduced as identical bills. Among other provisions, the bills called for mandatory school district participation, successful completion of the

minimum competency exam for graduation (unsuccessful test takers were to receive a certificate of attendance), and the creation of a test "item bank" by the Department of Public Instruction.

The chairpersons of both the Senate and Assembly Education Committees were opposed to the bills, as introduced. At the Senate Education Committee hearing on SB139, it became apparent that a majority of that committee opposed the bill and had strong reservations about the concept of minimum competency testing (MCT). Testimony at the Senate hearing also showed some of the supporting educational interest groups did so with reluctance and that the education community was divided on the issue.

Faced at that time with the prospect that neither committee would act on the issue and having access to the Joint Finance Committee through the bill's Senate author, the authors brought the bill to the Democrats' "education discussion group" of the Joint Finance Committee which approved it on an unofficial vote of 7-2. With that vote, the way was clear for the bill to be introduced into the budget by the Joint Finance Committee and the general feeling was that in lieu of the discussion group "straw vote" the Joint Finance Committee as a whole would approve the bill's inclusion in the budget. This prospect disturbed the opponents of the bill who realized that it might be more difficult to pry the legislation from the budget bill than to defeat it were it

standing alone. In a strongly worded and widely distributed letter the Chairperson of the Assembly Education Committee chastised the bill's Assembly author for bypassing the Education Committee which he said had plans to consider and act on the bill. The committee chairperson cited a number of grounds for his outrage and threatened non-cooperation in the Democratic caucus.

As a result of the preceding events a compromise was reached in which the budget included an appropriation for the Department of Public Instruction to build an item bank, MCT policy language was removed from the budget, and the Senate Education Committee Chairperson agreed to allow it out of his committee should it reach that point. Some have said that Superintendent Grover was instrumental in bringing about that compromise while others have pointed to Assembly Education Committee Chairperson Flintrop's positive pragmatism as an important factor.

The vote breakdown within the Assembly Education Committee on a series of motions showed that the Committee was almost evenly divided on the bill and that members' support or opposition to the bill changed and flip-flopped as various provisions of the bill were strengthened or deleted. An amended bill in which major provisions remained the same was eventually recommended for passage by the committee and the bill was remanded to the Assembly as a whole.

The diverse opinions and division which the Assembly Education Committee displayed was a microcosim of what transpired when the bill reached the Assembly floor. The major objection within the Assembly at this time was to the mandatory nature of the bill though other sub-issues also surfaced. Following heated debate and with the imminent possibility that the bill would be either killed or amended to become a voluntary program, the majority leader and author asked that unanimous consent be given for the bill to be laid on the table and the bill was put to rest for the time being.

Two months later a compromise was worked out between factions of the Assembly Education Committee, which among other things made school district participation in the programs voluntary. It had been agreed that the compromise substitute amendment (Sub 8) would be silent on the issue of whether and how the tests could be used in conjunction with teacher evaluation, with the expectation that an amendment to prohibit or limit the use of test scores for teacher evaluation would be introduced to stand or fall on its own. That amendment was introduced and was passed by the Assembly following heavy lobbying by the Wisconsin Education Association Council. The voluntary MCT bill passed the Assembly as amended and was messaged to the Senate.

At this time the bill remains in the Senate Committee and there is some uncertainty whether it will reach the floor of the Senate though significant pressure is likely to be

applied to force it there. The Chairperson of the Senate Education Committee has mentioned the possibility of sending the bill to the Senate with a negative recommendation and though the Senate has recently held a hearing on the bill in which the majority of the committee appeared to continue to oppose the bill, it has not taken definitive action.

The problems faced by minimum competency legislation in the Wisconsin Legislature mirror the difficulty of legislative enactment of detailed educational policy on any issue by a dedicated and conscientious legislature. In this case, clear demand of the public for improvement of basic skills education became complex as it was translated to a legislative educational initiative.

The process of that translation began with a plan to increase educational accountability at the local level. That plan was then transformed into a legislative initiative which would force districts to periodically reveal the basic skills progress of individual students to their parents and of school districts to the voting public and taxpayers.

While on the surface the accountability plan contained a relatively simple scenario of dynamic dimension, the specific aspects of the legislative initiative produced conflict within the educational community and between legislators with special interest in education.

The issues debated included questions of deep seated pedagogical division, and philosophical and political dimension.

Legislators wrestled with themselves and each other over such value-laden issues as the best way to motivate children to learn, and the utility, fairness, and validity of requiring objective referenced tests for high school graduation. The role of state government in education and the meaning of local control were hotly debated in both an abstract philosophical context and as a possible threat to school board preregatives in areas such as remedial education and standards of acceptable achievement.

An interesting aspect of the legislation was that money was appropriated for the test item bank before the policy was enacted. At first glance this appears a distortion of the legislative work-flow in which allocation follows successful articulation and aggregation. However, the item bank was a small budget item and it could be argued had value separate from MCT legislation. Without the potential negative aspects of MCT policy, with the good will granted the new state superintendent, and in the context of compromise the allocation was easily included in the budget.

Interest Group Involvement

The major educational organizations involved in the minimum competency issue were the Wisconsin Education Association Council, Wisconsin School Boards Association, and the Youth Policy and Law Center. Also involved to varying degrees (in some cases very important but less visible) were the Wisconsin School District Administrators,

Association of Wisconsin School Administrators and the Wisconsin Congress of Parents and Teachers.

The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) represents approximately 80 percent of Wisconsin's elementary and secondary teachers. WEAC has been a strong and consistent advocate of minimum competency testing and is the only education association in the nation to take that position. The National Education Association is on record as opposing MCT. The WEA was reported to have helped with early drafts of the current MCT legislation and a representative of the WEA testified in favor of competency testing at the nationally televised National Institute of Education hearings on MCT. According to WEAC representatives, the WEA position on competency testing arose from three factors. Those factors are the high proportion of public monies going to the finance of education, the public belief that students are not performing as well as they should in what is commonly referred to as the basic skills, and teachers' desire for a more positive state educational policy regarding educational achievement and grade promotion.

WEAC has conducted research on both student and teacher achievement and passed resolutions in favor of competency testing at the committee and Representative Assembly level.

WEAC performed a major role in the promotion of MCT as a legislative issue. WEAC has had drafts of competency testing legislation since the attempts by former Governor

Lucey to legislate state educational accountability in the mid and late 1970's. The effect of competency tests on individual teachers has been of great concern to the WEA's general membership and resulted in an amendment which, while allowing for dialogue between teachers and administrators concerning test scores, prohibited the use of those scores for teacher discipline or dismissal (Amendment 1 to Sub. 8, AB205). This amendment became a prerequisite of WEA support for the bill and the Assembly voted in favor of the amendment on a major and hotly contested role call vote. Reservations on the part of some numbers of teachers who were unsure what MCT would mean to them, and outright opposition to MCT by the second largest WEA bargaining unit in the state (Madison Teachers Incorporated) may have muted WEA's support of the bill and strengthened their resolve to include a "teacher protection clause."

The Wisconsin Federation of Teachers (WFT) has generally been opposed to competency testing and testified "neither for nor against" the legislation at one legislative hearing. However, the WFT does not appear to have been an important factor in the outcome of this legislation and views the current voluntary version as inconsequential.

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) has been the major educational interest group to oppose MCT legislation. One of the most prominent interest groups in educational policy making, the WASB has maintained a solid

reputation of providing good information to legislators (Lehne, 1981). WASB was organized in 1921 and has undergone many changes both before and since the 1950's when it is said the Director of the WASB (along with the State Superintendent and the Director of the WEA) was one of three persons who almost totally controlled the input of educational interest groups to the Legislature. The advent of collective bargaining, the organization of interest groups representing school district administrators and principals, changes in the profile and institutional structure of the Legislature and legislative staff, and the occurrence of new issues and interest groups are factors which have altered the process of educational policy making in Wisconsin.

The primary concerns of the WASB about the MCT bill occurred as a function of the WASB's representation of the interests of local boards. The mandatory nature of the MCT program including provisions for mandatory participation, mandatory remediation, and mandatory graduation sanctions were opposed by the WASB as usurpations of local control, as potentially costly items, and as points of possible litigation.

A major focus of WASB opposition was the so-called "teacher protection clause." The WASB did not want to take prerogatives from administrators and thought the bill should remain silent on the issue. WASB was also concerned that test results might be used as a tactic to confound teacher dismissal procedures.

An incorporated youth advocacy organization, the Youth Policy and Law Center, Education Project (Y.P.L.C.) was very active in opposing minimum competency testing legislation. Working from an eight point position paper, YPLC opposed the legislation in newspaper interviews, before the Senate and Assembly Education Committees and in the context of personal lobbying efforts. The major thrust of the YPLC arguments was of a philosophical nature consistent with their philosophy as child advocates. They insisted that the MCT program would remove responsibility from teachers, administrators and boards of education and place the burden of competency on the student. Other objections included alleged imprecise testing capability, concentration on basic rather than life skills, added paperwork, a narrowing of curriculum focus, increasing dropout rates, and homogenization of curriculum statewide.

The YPLC, WASB and several less active or less visible opponents of MCT legislation met and communicated frequently in a single issue coalition attempt to stop or disperse the competency testing mandate. The YPLC efforts appeared to have significant impact on minority legislators and on legislators described as "traditionally liberal," though it may best be viewed as only one of several factors which influenced those legislators.

Several other organizations have been important but because of the size of their staffs and other idiosyncracies,

they have been less actively involved or influential. The Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) has supported the concept of competency testing and testified for the bill at both the Senate and Assembly hearings. An important component of the educational community, WASDA was influential even though it does not have the staff to lobby extensively on an individual basis. WASDA has consistently and vigorously opposed language which prohibits administrators from using test results for teacher discharge or discipline. WASDA has favored remediation language if the cost of remediation is borne by the state.

Both WASDA and The Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA) had supported Dr. Grover in his successful campaign for State Superintendent and both indicated their unwillingness to outwardly oppose a bill he strongly supported. AWSA was less enthusiastic than WASDA in their support of the bill, registering at one hearing "neither for nor against" the bill. AWSA's reservations included questions about the cost of the program, whether improvement in student performance would actually occur, the impact on local district personnel, the problem of mobile students, potential dropout problems, and the contradiction of providing both local curriculum standards and statewide accountability.

A number of other organizations took positions on the bill and testified at the Senate and Assembly hearings.

Groups testifying or registering in favor of Senate Bill 139 or Assembly Bill 205 also included the WIsconsin Parent Teachers Association, the Midwest Educational Development Council, the Racine School District, the Administrators Supervisor Council, and the Wisconsin Farmers Union. The Wisconsin State Reading Association testified against the bills at the Senate and Assembly hearings. It is misleading, however, to assume that registration for or against a bill signifies complete agreement or disagreement since here as elsewhere the number of sub-issues involved makes it difficult to categorize groups. Testimony of the Racine School District which now uses a minimum competency testing program may have been significant for some legislators. Racine Schools testified in favor of MCT legislation but were concerned that it not disrupt what they consider their successful program.

Wisconsin Agency Activity

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction underwent a change of leadership between the time MCT legislation was introduced and when it reached the floor. Former Superintendent Barbara Thompson did not favor state legislated competency testing while her successor, Herbert Grover, has strongly advocated state competency testing legislation.

Legislators, legislative staff persons, and interest group leaders have said that the DPI has been an important participant in the development of competency testing policy.

The role of the DPI in the formation of competency testing policy can be described by three categories: technical assistance to those drafting the legislation, general informational activity involving legislators and school districts, and political or promotional activities.

For those drafting the legislation the technical assistance of the DPI was important. Specific aspects of the current legislation which have been attributed to DPI input are: testing at three grade levels instead of one or two; testing at grades 3, 7, and 10; the concept and practical application of an item bank; background information of a technical nature such as explanations of the difference between criterion and norm referenced testing; the phase-in time required for development of curriculum testing congruence and procedures; and information regarding existing testing and student accountability mechanisms. The DPI was also responsible for development of an implementation plan and fiscal estimate which resulted in the allocation of $438,000 and the authorization of five positions.

The DPI conducted general informational workshops and presentations for both legislators, legislative staff, and school personnel. Those activities included airing of the NIE advocate style debate on competency testing, bringing in James Popham, an MCT expert and advocate, to address the State Superintendent's Conference for School District Administrators, inviting all legislators to an airing of a

video tape of Popham's address in the Capitol building, and meetings between DPI staff and teachers, administrators, and board members throughout the state regarding local implications of MCT legislation.

Although it is difficult to separate some promotional and political activities from those of a more educational nature, State Superintendent Grover and his top level assistants were politically active. During the period of legislative articulation and aggregation, Dr. Grover held more than twelve separate editorial conferences, and addressed a variety of audiences. MCT legislation was always one of four or five major subjects of the State Superintendent's agenda of those conferences and speeches. In the editorial conferences he carried the issue throughout the state including the editorial offices in the home towns of the bill's major opponents, with the result that a number of significant newspapers have editorialized in favor of MCT legislation. He promises to continue his appeals to the public throughout the fall election period if an acceptable bill is not passed. The ability of Dr. Grover to use the media and public opinion effectively may stem from his years in the State Legislature from which he voluntarily retired to become a school district administrator. A popular figure in Wisconsin, Grover's political strength includes his continuing close ties with legislators and good will with the Governor and other state officials. Many legislators indicated personal contact from

Dr. Grover on the MCT issue both by phone, letter, and face-to-face meetings. During the 1981 election, Grover garnered the endorsement of every major educational interest group except the Wisconsin Association of School Boards which has traditionally not made endorsements. Grover was reported to have had an important role in bringing about the moderation of some groups' positions on MCT legislation and is generally attributed to have been a major force behind the resulting compromises. The personal relationships of a long-standing nature between Grover and various interest group leaders and members contributed to his mediating and sponsorship activities.

Governor Dreyfus, a first term Republican governor and former college chancellor, defeated both the Republican party regulars and Democratic incumbent in his 1978 election bid. The Governor has been described as a "secondary player" in the competency testing issue and as supportive of the State Superintendent. While the MCT issue itself has not been a real high profile issue for the Governor who is beset and preoccupied with very significant state budget problems, MCT is within the scope of the Youth Initiative Program he proposed and successfully championed. That program provides funding for basic skills education programs aimed at those students who have "fallen through the cracks" of the educational system and is tied to youth employment training and a reduction in unemployment.

As is his procedure with most legislation, the Governor has not led or been highly visible in the competency testing issue, yet his influence has been significant. Despite a "line veto" option, he authorized $438,000 for test item bank development in the 1981-83 State Budget. In his budget message the Governor said the action "will help us meet the responsibility of ensuring students are progressing in their education" and "I believe competency testing is essential if students as well as parents are to know how students are doing, and know in time for corrective action to be taken." The Governor also sent a letter to

one of the bills' authors saying that he "continue(d) to support the concept of competency testing" and that he believed it is possible to develop a legal and reliable basic skills testing mechanism which will protect and enhance access to quality education for both minority and majority students."

Political Issues and Interaction

The author perceives MCT legislation as arising out of broad based but generally unarticulated public belief that their education dollar is being misspent. The public and business are particularly concerned about low levels of basic skill achievement by high school graduates while the broadened curriculum continues to expand. Fearing a "taxpayer revolt" and engaged in a battle for resources which continue to diminish and in which public good will is needed, several powerful segments of the education community have combined to support MCT legislation. The WEA is mindful of the necessity of an unrestricted flow of tax dollars, increasingly interested in teacher involvement in the curriculum, and concerned about teacher quality and effective education. MCT is a vehicle which can potentially bring about change in each of those areas. The new State Superintendent, Grover, Senator Offner, and Representative Loftus have provided political leadership by appealing to the motivation of the public for basic skill improvement and educational egalitarianism. In the words of one person, they have "stirred the pot" of public opinion. The politicians have raised an issue which the media loves. Editorials, letters to the editor and reader interest follow MCT proclamations and the politicians have not minded being covered with ink.

Educators are divided in their views of MCT legislation. Much of the educational establishment would like to see the MCT issue go away. They are comfortable doing what they have been doing for years and consider problems of basic skills and public hostility to be a product of the times, the 60's and television. Some view the ills of education not of their doing and beyond their ability to repair. A good number are said to oppose MCT because of the substantial amount of energy required to thoroughly implement the proposed program. The opponents of MCT include the traditional and previously established leaders of the Wisconsin educational monolith. The WASB has represented the interests of stability and status quo on the basis of "local control" and technical troubles resulting from the implementation of MCT. Interestingly enough, proponents of MCT legislation claim to favor local control as well. The question in Wisconsin is not so much one of state control versus local control but one of who controls at the local level. MCT would force school districts to report basic skill test results to parents and public on an annual basis. Supporters believe MCT would provide a greater degree of accountability and would force a substantial curricular overhaul in districts throughout the state. The bill calls for an "active involvement of school district administrators,

teachers and parents," and tests must "reflect the school district's curriculum and standards of proficiency in reading, language arts, and mathematics." MCT opponents who stress the "political" nature of MCT most often cite the ambitions of individuals but broader political ramifications are at the root of the controversy.

Mandatory and public accountability would create an unstable and potentially dynamic situation in local school districts. It is in the best interest of those out of power at the local level (WEA) to favor a dynamic sort of accountability and for those in power at the local level (WASB) to oppose such a potentially disruptive force.

Educators in favor of MCT focus on changes which they believe MCT can engender. Greater educational effectiveness, ultimately better community relations, and a stronger school system ready to meet the challenge of public school critics are reasons why some educators support MCT. These persons view curricular or political change as good and necessary.

Educators opposed to MCT have a number of specific and general reasons for their opposition and much of that rationale has been reported elsewhere in this paper. Some opposition to MCT legislation arose from an existing curriculum evaluation and program certification organization. A major theme of many University educators opposed to MCT is

opposition to what they perceive as part of the "back to the basics" movement. This latter group includes liberal educators of the 60's and 70's who are trying to maintain a toehold on their place within the expanded curriculum. This group has had the capability of sowing doubt about the effects of competency testing. It is difficult to conceive of an issue with more potential complexities than MCT. Educators to whom every different idea means a different publication have been able to raise many issues which attack the credibility of MCT or its successful implementation.

In this era of teacher surplus the WEA has made no secret that teacher competency and teacher certification standards are items on its agenda. In MCT some university educators see the tip of the proverbial iceberg and fear that the next target of dynamic accountability may be them. The dissenters in Wisconsin higher education have been represented by the YPLC and have influenced some key legislators and the legislative initiative. Of course, many dissenters have sincere concerns, some convinced MCT means the initiation of class structure.

Education in Wisconsin today is politically vital though some lament the passage of the time when education was the only major social issue. The various educational interest groups are fragmented yet combine in fluid coalitions

when in their collective best interests. At the same time the MCT bill was undergoing emasculation by opposing educational parties, the fragments combined to successfully gain control of taxation and spending in 40 city school districts in Wisconsin for the Boards of Education of those districts.

The polarization of Wisconsin educational interests which occurred during the MCT fight has been to some degree mitigated by Superintendent Grover. In a campaign in which "leadership" was the major issue, Grover was supported by large segments of the educational community because of his political savvy and leadership potential. Grover's tough leadership and competitive activist style was perceived as needed in an era when conflict between state priorities was imminent. A proponent of MCT both personally and professionally, Grover did not act as a broker in the traditional sense, yet his personal ties to leaders and members made it possible for him to cause movement in the positions of opposing interest groups.

Governor Dreyfus whose public appeal is renowned could hardly ignore or oppose an issue as popular with the public as basic skills and MCT. Also, while the Governonr did not endorse a candidate in the last state superintendent election despite the incumbent's Republican heritage, his wife's endorsement of Grover has not been lost on observers of Wisconsin educational politics. The Governor's support of MCT has been consistent with his legislative initiatives.

Because this is an election year legislators have had to deal with the issue carefully. Legislative polls have shown public support for MCT to be strongly favorable. Opponents of MCT, such as the Senate Education Committee Chairperson who have stated their case to the public find their newsletter polls still show that a test requirement for graduation from high school is supported by more than 75 percent of those returning the polls. The many different issues involved in the legislation will allow campaigning legislators to claim support for MCT despite voting against the bill because of a particular provision. It will be interesting to see if Grover, who has promised to take the issue to the people during the fall election, is able to exact public commitments from legislators previously opposed to MCT.

The Current Bill

The MCT bill in its present form is quite different from the MCT legislation first introduced. Many of the changes are of a technical nature and involve provisions such as the length of time allowed for the DPI to develop the test item bank and the number of parallel tests to be developed. Most of these changes were made at the request of the DPI. Other changes are apparently the result of the legislative process of allocation based on input demand, competing opinion and interest.

The bill has changed from one of mandatory public school district participation to voluntary participation and greater local options. This major compromise was made in the Assembly and was the provision under which it received a majority vote in that house.

The bill has also been softened in regard to the original requirement linking successful completion of a competency test to graduation. The current bill allows but does not require consideration of competency tests in the awarding of graduation diplomas. It does require that the test not be the "sole criteria" on which that decision is based.

The current bill specifies that test results may be used in the context of teacher evaluation but are not to be introduced in cases of discharge or dismissal. Included in the bill because of insistence by the WEA, this provision may be the most controversial component and was not included in the original bill. There is speculation that the "teacher protection" clause came about because the WEA experienced a backlash from its members who are less inclined to promote educational change than the leadership.

Remedial services are required under the current bill for students not meeting proficiency standards. Because of the potential costs of remediation this issue has been important. Legislators wishing to ensure remediation efforts demanded this provision but many remain dissatisfied that

determination of appropriate remedial ser ices is specifically left to the discretion of school districts. MCT proponents are convinced that the demand for broader remedial mandates is an attempt to weigh the bill down with cost items leading to its defeat.

Conclusion

Competency testing is one of the more interesting yet complicated educational issues to come before the Wisconsin legislature in recent years. The education community and interest groups have conflicting opinions about both the concept and the application of MCT. Interest groups and agencies have competed extensively on this issue while at the same time maintaining good relations and cooperative efforts on a number of other pieces of legislation.

If the bill is passed, it will come about because of a number of strong and unique pressures. Polls show public opinion regarding competency testing is nighly favorable. The results of legislator's newsletter polls indicate that between 75 and 92 percent of their constituents endorse the notion of competency testing, including the graduation requirement.

The unique personal qualities of the state superintendent and the unique power of that office in Wisconsin government has strengthened the move to competency testing. The ability of the state superintendent to appeal to the public, educational professional organizations, the legislature, the Governor and key individuals throughout those institutions and the state has been a major factor in the development of MCT policy. His willingness to utilize the expertise of DPI personnel to ensure quality educational

legislation has increased the likelihood of the bill's passage. The predisposition of the Governor of Wisconsin toward MCT and the influence of his proposals and item veto power contribute to tne prospect of MCT legislation.

The partnership of two influential, upwardly mobile, and extremely capable legislators, their willingness to compromise, and their ability to provide legislative leadership nas been an essential element of the bill's progress.

Increased legislative staffing has given individual legislators the capability of initiating complicated pieces of legislation. While specific input and support of some interest groups is necessary, legislative reliance on interest groups for information has diminshed. This capability has reduced the effectiveness of the opposition and in a general way reduced the influence of the educational community.

Support of the bill by the largest state teachers' organization is remarkable since it is the only major teachers organization in the nation to do so. WEA support has been an important factor in the organization of the legislation and its continued success.

There is little doubt that Wisconsin will soon have some sort of MCT legislation. A voluntary participation MCT bill with a "teacher protection" clause is now awaiting action by the Senate following passage by the Assembly.

Superintendent Grover told a Senate committee that 20 school districts would participate initially in a voluntary program. Whether it gets out of the Senate committee is dependent on the strength of a previous compromise and the priority given the bill by its Senate sponsor. If Senator Offner brings all potential pressure to bear on the Senate Education Committee Chairman, it is unlikely that the bill will stay in the committee. Once the bill is out of committee it appears certain that the author has enough Senate votes to strengthen the bill by adding a provision making MCT mandatory. What would then happen to the bill in conference committee is unclear but with the number of chips on the table at that point it is likely that a strengthened MCT bill would be approved. The legislature will adjourn on April 2 and AB205 will die if not acted upon by that time. The Governor is most likely to sign the bill either way. If no bill or a voluntary bill passes, the supporters of mandatory MCT will be back in the legislature in January to pass or strengthen the law. The forces combined in favor of mandatory MCT are powerful and this author considers mandatory MCT legislation the most likely short or long range outcome.

The responsible opposition to MCT legislation by both legislators and interest groups contributed to the depth, quality and workability of the legislation.

Finally, the pragmatic, and consciencious work of the legislators themselves, particularly the Assembly

education committee and the bill's authors led to the development of a bill which has been termed "the most responsible minimum competency law in the nation" (Schmidt 1982).

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Institutional Paradigm

Aspects of Wisconsin government which have affected minimum competency testing policy formation.

State Superintendent

- Elected, 4 year term
- No State Board of Education

Department of Public Instruction

- Technical capability
- Legislative liaison capability

Governor

- Line item veto power

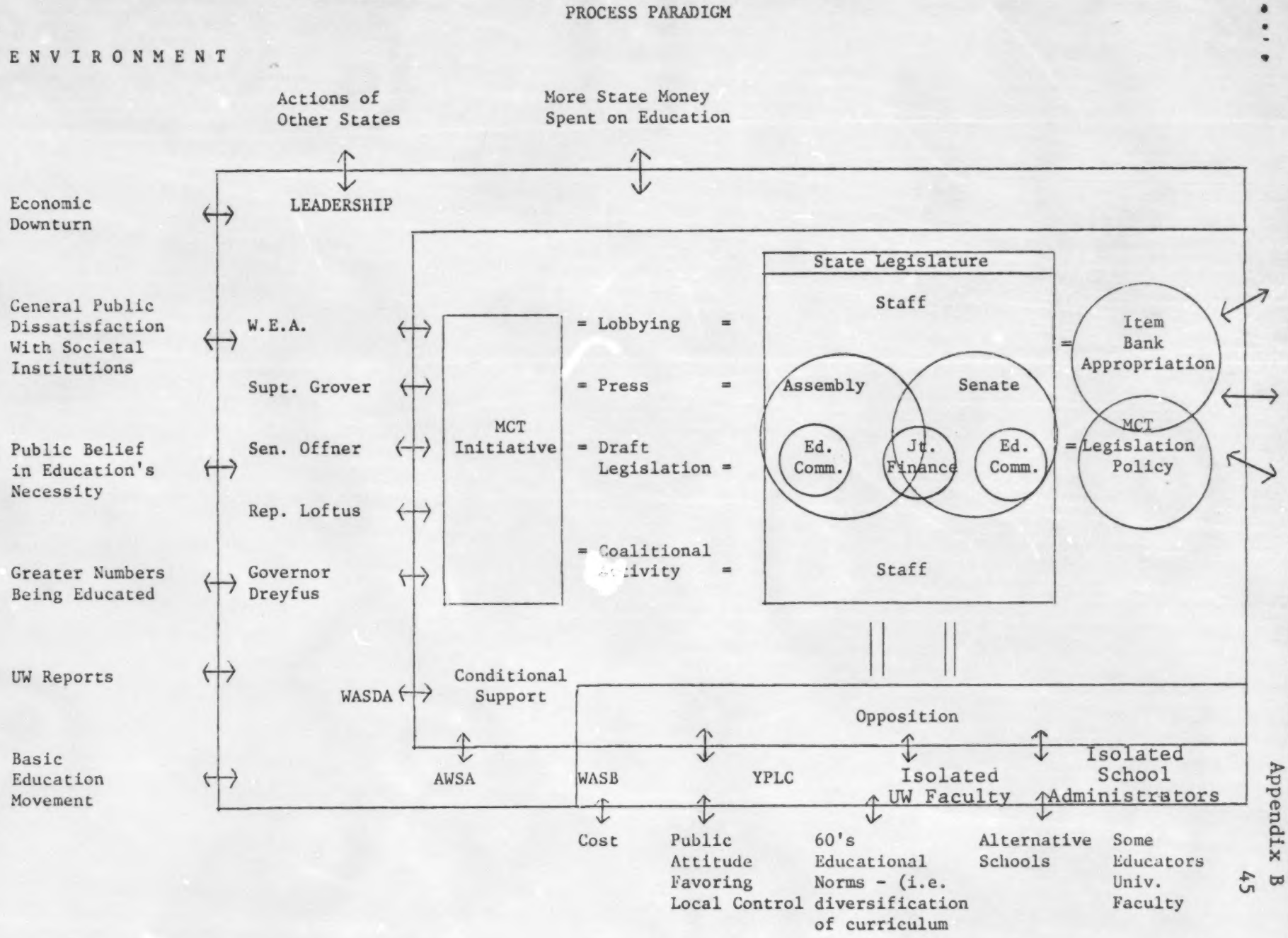
Legislature

- Extensively staffed
- More former educators and board members
- More full time legislators

Collective Bargaining Law

- Political Action Committees

PROCESS PARADIGM



Appendix B

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